

Introduction

Any suggestion favoring censorship in the arts and sciences is most naturally viewed by us with suspicion as arising from the illiberal interest of party or sect. The arms of repression have so long been used only to bolster corrupt and decaying regimes or to institute tyrannical ones that the free development of the arts now appears to be a necessary condition, if not the core, of a republican way of life. It is hard to believe that during the greater part of recorded history disinterested, that is to say, philosophic, men were of the opinion that republics required the greatest self-imposed restraints whereas tyrannies and other decadent regimes could often afford the greatest individual liberties. They began from the presupposition that a free society governed by its members is in need of the most careful education in order that the citizens have the requisite virtues for ruling themselves and one another. Hence, all the elements of moral and intellectual training are a legitimate object of concern to the society as a whole, which should in principle be willing to sacrifice even very charming or respectable pursuits on the altar of its liberty, if they happen to conflict with that most valuable of possessions. In this perspective, all studies and forms of entertainment must justify themselves before the bar of public utility and prove that, if not positively salutary, they are at least not harmful to the order on which self-government is founded; no form of science or art can be assumed to be beneficial prior to examination, and the difficulty of judging such questions does not do away with the necessity for their consideration.

For the older writers, this form of political supervision of the arts is to be sharply distinguished from the arbitrary repression by

weak and frightened governments of anything they consider threatening, contrary to all principles of justice and decency; nor can it be identified with the ever renascent attempts to destroy the freedom of citizens to speak their minds honestly concerning public affairs. Far rather it was understood to be the means by which citizens able and willing to take a real and courageous interest in public affairs could be formed. And, indeed, even those who proposed the most liberal policies concerning the arts and sciences prior to the nineteenth century felt themselves obliged to argue that the liberties they defended would in themselves lend to the establishment and perpetuation of republican institutions and to make distinctions between those which should be accepted and those which should be banished. They did not differ from their opponents about the principle of censorship; they only denied that the limits proposed by the more severe were advantageous to self-government.

We, on the contrary, tend to see in censorship only the instruments of tyranny and a threat to freedom; what was formerly the concern of republics now appears to be only the interest of totalitarians. Democracy seems to need no defense, or, to put it otherwise, it is generally assumed that the progress of the arts must necessarily parallel that of civil society or that their unlimited freedom insures the discovery and political dominance of the truth. Generally, such a position implies as its premise, often unexamined, the idea of progress. If we do not accept this notion, if freedom is always threatened and barbarism always possible, the whole question must be reopened; an attempt must be made to discuss in a thoroughgoing manner the conditions of free government and to find the principles by which the various pursuits which claim admission to a republic can be judged. All this must be done in order to be able to distinguish between the really important elements of our liberty and the pretenders which have gained credit by assimilating themselves to the truly necessary and noble pursuits; the fate of the most cherished rights should not be bound up with that of

a licence and self-indulgence incapable of resisting impartial examination. Such consideration is necessary not only for the legislator but also for the artist, who can thereby reflect on his responsibilities to civil society, a duty he can easily shirk when encouraged by an ideology which persuades him that whatever he does will be for the good of the whole.

Since the habit of reflection on these issues has disappeared, and with it even the terms of the debate, we must, in order to remind ourselves, return to the discussion as it existed prior to the emergence of the idea of progress as a fixed doctrine. One of the last great voices raised in favor of censorship was Jean Jacques Rousseau, who presented a detailed account of the effects of the arts on civil society. The occasion for his interest in this problem was his quarrel with the Enlightenment, his break with those who believed that the cultivation of reason, the progress in the sciences and the dissemination of the results of that knowledge, as well as the taste for the fine arts, would make society ever more decent and men ever happier. Since Descartes and Spinoza, all the pens of philosophers had battled against the restrictions, political and religious, which hindered the free pursuit of their activities; and most generous men had been persuaded to recognize the Republic of Letters as a legitimate society of the wise established within the boundaries of the existing regimes, a society at times at odds with the rulers of the real republics, but one which by its lights would gradually transform the others and lead them to a justice and a glory surpassing those of the ancients. Philosophy would purge men of prejudice and make their duties clear without the aid of superstition; the fine arts would civilize them and remove their barbarous rudeness, a vestige of earlier times; and the mechanical arts would procure them a longer and more comfortable life.

This project reached its most definitive expression in Rousseau's time with *l'Encyclopédie*, the major divisions of which correspond to the three parts of the project. *L'Encyclopédie* was the life work of great and devoted men who offered up their talents to

the betterment of humanity and who risked their security in the struggle against fanatic opposition. All that was decent and fine seemed to be on their side, and they took for granted that their gifted contemporary would join them, as would all men of science and learning, in their attempt to present the whole of human intellectual achievement in a clear form for the public. But Rousseau decided to use his great eloquence to oppose them and to stand, alone, for virtue, the science of simple souls—virtue, whose place he could not find in any of the parts of *l'Encyclopédie* and whose interests, in his view, ran counter to those of the Encyclopedists. Rousseau, who should have been the heir of his illustrious predecessors, willingly disinherited himself and perversely and incomprehensibly chose Rome, Sparta, and primitivism over the polished charm of modernity. He appears to have substituted for science a sentimental longing for an irretrievable but heroic past, a past degraded and debunked by the criticisms of reason; thus we have come to call him the father of romanticism.

To understand the motives behind Rousseau's unaccountable rejection of his birthright we must look to the particular reasons he himself adduces for it in his writings; a general dissatisfaction with modernity cannot account for it, nor can it be reduced to a mere expression of Rousseau's own incapacity to live in this later age. One of the most revealing documents we possess in this respect is his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre*. Rousseau, the most personal of philosophers, had a way of endowing the incidents of his life with the most general significance, of making them mere reverberations of cosmic conflicts. He tried to represent in his person the deepest problems of humanity. The *Letter to d'Alembert* is a good illustration of this rule; it can be, and has often been, interpreted as another example of Rousseau's vanity, spitefulness, and madness; all of this may very well be true, but it is not the whole truth. Careful study of this neglected work gives evidence of the clear and easily defensible character of the reasoning which

led him to condemn the theatre as a form of entertainment. The present translation is dedicated to its revival.

The particular circumstances which provided the occasion for this book—which constituted his definitive break with the Encyclopedists—are reminiscent of a drama whose particular events are all meant to epitomize general issues; it is like a morality play, entitled “The Spirit of the Enlightenment against the Spirit of Republican Virtue.” The *dramatis personae* are Rousseau, the protagonist; d’Alembert, the editor of *l’Encyclopédie* and the author of its plan; and behind him, unmentioned but nevertheless the key figure, the genius of the Enlightenment incarnate, Voltaire. The circumstances were, briefly, the following: Voltaire, in his exile, had gone to live on the outskirts of Geneva in the year 1755. Geneva, the birthplace of Rousseau and the modern image of the antique *polis* for him, was a republic governed by its citizens; it was the city of Calvin and was noted for a severe civic code that included sumptuary laws and a ban on the theatre. A city so near France could not help being influenced by its atmosphere and a large body of Genevans wanted to share in the sophisticated marvels of the French theatre; they were opposed by the clergy. Voltaire, who represented the theatre, who hoped to civilize and to instruct with it, and who loved to see and act in plays, brought a new impetus to the dispute; he was bored without a theatre and set himself up in opposition to the interdiction, single-handedly undertaking to overturn Geneva’s laws and take advantage of the unlawful craving for the theatre to be found in many Genevans, even among the clergy. One weapon to be used in the struggle was *l’Encyclopédie* with its enormous influence in affecting opinion. An article on Geneva was to appear in 1757, and Voltaire persuaded d’Alembert, who was to write it, to insert a passage (which Rousseau insists Voltaire himself wrote) in an otherwise laudatory presentation suggesting that Geneva should have a theatre, a theatre governed by stern laws so that the Genevans could refine their taste and combine the civility of the Athenians

with the virtues of the Spartans. At this, in early 1758, Rousseau entered the fray, indignant that the authority of the sciences should be used to gratify the passions of an individual to what he tried to demonstrate was the detriment of Geneva. To him this represented what Enlightenment could easily become. He used his powerful rhetoric, a rhetoric that has perhaps never been equaled in its capacity to move the hearts of contemporaries and to express their unavowed wishes, to defeat Voltaire, and in so doing Rousseau presented as complete a treatment of the arts in relation to politics as has ever been produced. Such a treatment requires an analysis of the whole character of political life: hence the *Letter to d'Alembert* is a comprehensive theoretical work—one that looks at civil society from what might be the most revealing viewpoint, that of its relation to the works of the mind.

As I have said, the *Letter to d'Alembert* is a work of rhetoric, a public letter designed to have a persuasive effect on a particular audience. It is directed to this audience; the arguments used are appropriate to it; and the things chosen to be said or left out of consideration, as well as the style, depend on its special character. Rhetoric, by its very nature, implies that simple reason does not suffice for persuasion, that there is an element of unreason and passion which is an essential part of the understanding of man; the very form indicates a problem which supplements our understanding of the subject matter contained within it. Rousseau's audience is the many, and this means the many who are the subjects of civil society. He indicates that the dimension of politics is other than that of science or philosophy, and he repeats again and again that the considerations he raises and the way in which he argues them are limited by those to whom he speaks. Hence much that is found elsewhere in his thought is not to be found in the *Letter to d'Alembert*. He identifies himself with the many, and whatever in him may transcend their limits can only be alluded to here; the rest of himself is irrelevant and perhaps noxious to civil society.

Only he who believes in a natural harmony between civil so-

ciety and the few best individuals can afford to forget this problem. This helps to account for the paradoxical tone of Rousseau's thought as a whole; it is not a result of his own complications but of those of human life itself, of which he is only a most revealing reflection due to his peculiar sensitivity to things in their breadth and depth. Politics must be a separate study because of the reasons implied in the fact that rhetoric must be used in it; if it were to be studied from the point of view of the whole or of what is simply desirable for the best man, it would lose its outlines. So it is not as "le pauvre Jean-Jacques" that he addresses himself to the problem of a theatre in Geneva but as "J.-J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva." Out of philanthropy he identifies himself with his fellows and makes himself hardly distinguishable from them. He underlines this by addressing d'Alembert as a member of six learned societies, drawing the sharpest contrast between his unadorned citizenship and d'Alembert's titles of science. He wishes to make it understood that articles like the one on Geneva are not really philosophic, that they only pretend to be, that they are trying to persuade; but, because their authors do not seriously consider the difference between disinterested search for truth and the necessary prejudices and special interests of political life, their science not only turns into propaganda but also damages the real interests of their nations; society can never be fully rational, and the attempt to make it so perverts science and corrupts society. Man in society is governed by habits, and reason is more likely to provide him with arguments for self-indulgence than with incentive to do his duty. The practice of the arts, which can ennoble some, creates an atmosphere which encourages the many who are not artists to pursue mere pleasure. There is a disproportion between science understood by itself and human happiness; human happiness is Rousseau's choice, at least here. It is something different to speak as a philosopher and as a citizen.

Rousseau, who attacks writers and discourages science, must explain why he writes and why he himself is so avid for learning

that he has devoted his life to it. He cannot deny that there are rare men of special talents; nor, when defending a state like Geneva, can he contend that savagery is sufficient. When he appears in the guise of a citizen, he gives it to be understood that the function of his talents is to defend society against false theories and the improper use of reason. Men like Socrates, Newton, and Bacon were great because they were motivated by love of mankind and were protectors of virtue. They were reticent in their manner of speech not because of fear of their contemporaries, as d'Alembert suggests in the Preliminary Discourse to *l'Encyclopédie*, but out of duty to them. So Rousseau presents his science as not of value in itself but only insofar as it fulfils this clear purpose. He was forced to write by d'Alembert; he would have preferred to remain silent. But his duty to his country compels him to take up his pen and sacrifice his leisure; he must also endanger his reputation. Further, he is an example of a man to whom principle means more than propriety or politeness; the rules of mutual self-indulgence current among literary men cannot prevent him from hearing the call of virtue. By this posture, he again distinguishes himself from his contemporaries and sets the example for a healthy morality unaffected by the conventions of polite society. He is dying, and his last efforts are given to his country in a time of need. Corresponding to this description is the atmosphere of sentiment which Rousseau attempts to create by his Preface. He stimulates the passion of beneficence, of sympathy for one's fellow creatures. In his correction of Hobbes and the whole tradition depending on him, Rousseau argues that, if passion is the root of sociality, self-love is not the passion sufficient to bind society together nor on which to base men's duties to one another; another passion, not derivative from self-love, exists, and it is beneficence. The progress of society and science succeeds in dimming its lights, and vanity takes its place. But the health of society depends on fanning the embers of beneficence; it is the only truly social passion, and Rousseau tries to speak to it, or, as he would say, to the heart. Beneficence vanishes under

the criticism of reason, or, at least that of the reason of the Enlightenment; Rousseau uses all his art to make the life of men together attractive not only to the reason but to the affections; he paints for us the nobility, the satisfaction, and the joy of citizenship.

D'Alembert had also suggested in his article that the pastors of Geneva were Socinians, deists and rationalists; this he intended as praise. Rousseau begins his response with a discussion of this problem, and in spite of its apparent irrelevance to the question of the theatre its presence is very much to the point. Although we know that the religion he presents to his *Emile* goes even further than that of the Socinians in the direction of rationalism, and that Rousseau himself probably went even further than the Savoyard Vicar, he here undertakes the defense of those who still think that belief in the mysteries of revealed religion is legitimate. There is a connection between the position on the theatre of the Encyclopedists and their doctrines concerning religion. Their rationalism presupposed that the maxims of morality could be made clear to all men on the basis of unaided reason. Rousseau appears to deny this. The religious beliefs of a nation are bound up essentially with its practices and its laws; most men are incapable of seeing their real duties without the addition of a religious faith and observance; this faith and observance may very well not be in accordance with what can be proved by universal reason, but it is nonetheless necessary. What can be proved by reason to the majority of men is only the interested calculation of personal benefit and, along with the religion, the citizens' love for one another that Rousseau considered the essence of a real republic would also disappear. The same reasoning which argues that the theatre will civilize men argued in favor of a simply natural religion. The opinion about this higher question, as it were, determines the opinion about the secondary question of the theatre. Rather than having a civilizing effect, he believes that this natural religion would degrade man. Hence he tries to bolster the authority of the pastors who are against the theatre.

The effect of d'Alembert's imputation that the pastors of Geneva were Socinian was to separate them from the pious fundamentalists and to put them willy-nilly in the camp of the more liberal citizens who wanted a theatre. The pastors were thus made to appear heretic to their traditional supporters, besides being intimidated into thinking that the only way to be reasonable and enlightened was to be Socinian. Rousseau protects them against the charge of heresy, but in such a way as not to force them to be strictly orthodox or fundamentalist. He wishes the clergy to be freed from the necessity of making a choice between reason and revelation, a choice forced upon them by the conflict between the traditionalists and the Encyclopedists. He tries to lend the authority of philosophy to a religious teaching based on the belief in revelation; for, if the religious rationalism of the Encyclopedists is accepted, then it is hard to find a defense for the moral commands of the revealed religion which appear to the many to be the only source for obedience to severe laws. Rousseau only touches on this delicate subject in attempting to establish a doctrine which, while incorporating the concern of the Encyclopedists for tolerance as over against fanaticism (a concern which he considered more than legitimate), would not destroy the meaning of the particular religions. He takes a stand for the national religions as over against cosmopolitanism.

Contrary to what might be expected, in establishing his argument against the theatre Rousseau turns neither to the example of primitivism nor to the authority of theology, but to the thought of classical antiquity. More precisely, in opposing the rationalism of the Enlightenment, he does not reject rationalism but supports his position by an older rationalism which did not share the political and moral optimism of the moderns but which still regarded human reason as the only standard. Rousseau draws his arguments chiefly from Plato and points to the possibility of an alternative to the moderns which remains philosophic. Elsewhere this solution may not have appeared adequate to him, but so far as the *Letter to*

d'Alembert is concerned his argument could have been enunciated by Plato, and we are to understand that, however much he may have differed from the ancients, he believed their articulation of the political phenomena to be far superior to anything since proposed, especially in the crucial area of the arts. The only preparation for the writing of this book which we know Rousseau to have done is that he made a paraphrase of Book X of Plato's *Republic*,* and its influence on the text is evident. The *Letter to d'Alembert* is a comprehensive restatement of a theme which had begun to disappear from the discussion of political theory, a theme which for older thinkers had been central to any study of politics and which revealed the ambiguities of politics better than any other. It is, perhaps, as a clear defense of Plato in terms which reflect the pathos of modernity that this book is most valuable to us; it could well be used as a threshold to enter into classical political theory, which has become so alien to us.

Rousseau divides his treatment of the theatre into three general parts. He begins with a discussion of the effect of dramas on men in general; the issue is whether theatrical beauties play a necessary role in the education of good citizens. Next, he discusses the sort of societies which are required to support a theatre and the general effect of its presence in contrast to that of the institutions it displaces. And, finally, he presents an analysis of the institutions of Geneva and a suggestion about the sorts of entertainments which would most enhance and strengthen its free, republican way of life. He engages in this latter argument in order to provide a model of the true statesmanship of the philosopher, a statesmanship grounded on the consciousness of the inadequacy of universal reasoning to take account of the conditions appropriate to decent political life in particular places.

Rousseau begins with the premise that the theatre is a form of amusement; it exists for the pleasure of those who attend it and, if it hopes in any way to instruct, it must do so by means of the

* *De l'imitation théâtrale*

pleasures. The fact that it is an amusement does not mean that it is a matter of indifference to the legislator; it leads men by what is most immediate and attractive, pleasure, and it is of prime importance to see that the things they take pleasure in are appropriate to a healthy life and that their work and their duties do not conflict with their pleasures. A man must enjoy what he does and love his country in order for him to fulfil his duties and be a citizen who can be relied upon. The best life would be one which provided its own pleasures as a result of its own activity without the need for external sources of amusement; if this is impossible for most men, then those amusements which support and encourage a man in the activities he must perform should be developed. A man whose pleasures bear no relation to the life he leads in the ordinary course of affairs is both miserable and highly untrustworthy; a nation that needs a great number of artificial amusements has lost its taste for its life, and the citizens are likely to be stale and shallow; their activities are not an object of passionate concern and they waste their energies unproductively. The amusements form men's tastes and present them with the objects that appeal most directly to them. The duties of a father, husband, and a citizen are so important and time-consuming that they are bound to suffer when they are no longer a source of pleasure. Because the amusements play such a large role in the formation of character, each one must be examined carefully in its subtle relations to human conduct and to the specific circumstances in which it is to be used before it can be considered admissible. Different countries with different ways of life require different amusements. It is improbable that the universal desirability which d'Alembert attaches to the theatre could be real, for political life implies diversity of national characters; even if the theatre were desirable in itself, the delicate structure of the way of life in any particular country might be undone by importation of alien pleasures. Universal arguments in politics are based on an indifference to the real diversities manifest in it; what men have in common that is politically relevant is not very great

and does not include the specific nobility that any one society may embody.

Now, since all amusements appeal to the pleasures of the audiences, their authors are entirely dependent on those audiences for the style and subject matter of their presentation. No matter how excellent the intentions of writers, their works cannot possess a theoretical perfection, for, if nobody comes to see them, if they do not please, they fail entirely. A writer's first rule must be success, and hence he can do nothing that is not wanted by the people. Men cannot be constrained to go to the theatre; the theatre is so revealing precisely because it can only succeed when it touches what is really wanted. Men can be forced to listen to sermons but cannot be forced to enjoy plays. This constitutes the major difference between the thinker and the dramatist; the thinker states the truth as he sees it and is indifferent whether anybody reads him or agrees with him, while the dramatist must appeal to the dominant concerns of the people at large no matter what the status of those concerns might be. Reason has no place in the theatre; drama works through the passions, the very passions which already exist in those who come to it. It may paint some of those passions as ugly, but it cannot paint all of them so; nor will the public permit its dearest desires to be taken lightly, as reason might do; a philosopher on the stage would be absurd or hateful. The drama must awaken the passions; however, it does not necessarily awaken those which have salutary effects, but only those which exist or are dear to the people. A writer can never be in advance of his times; he must be a sensitive instrument reflecting the desires, often still inarticulate, of his age. Even when he presents the most exotic themes he must transform them so that they can move the men of his own time and place; otherwise, such themes will have no meaning for them at all. Although some genius might find a rare and unusual way of moving his audiences and thus manage to avoid some of these difficulties, the theatre is not founded on the rarest talent. A writer who managed to conceal the truth in his works so that only a man

of particular wit and intelligence could understand it would be laudable, but his effect on the great mass of mankind would still be the same as that of his fellow authors. The important consideration is that of the rough general effect on the greatest-number of those who are influenced by the theatre, for it is they who create the tone of society. Hence the effect of the theatre is to reinforce national character, to augment the natural inclinations and give a new energy to all of the passions; and from this can be drawn the first general formulation: the theatre is good for good men and bad for bad ones.

Dramatists and critics in former times felt themselves constrained to reflect on the moral effects of the drama in a way which is not always comprehensible to us; they did not believe that whatever an artist does is good or that art has any peculiar value apart from its effect on men. Not only did the intrinsic truth of a work have to be taken into consideration but also whether that truth would be grasped by the public at large; and even if the first conditions were met, there was still the question whether that truth was one which was salutary and a suitable object for special public attention. Rousseau, accordingly, examines the alleged advantages of tragedy and comedy. Tragedy was understood to purge and purify the passions and to provide examples of their dangerous effects. But any man who consults his heart after a tragedy is aware that he is deeply affected and softened. Although great sufferings may be depicted, the high level of intensity and the great joys which accompany them induce men to prefer a life which bears such risks rather than one devoid of both the joys and the sorrows engendered by great passion. And in choosing the passions which he presents as attractive, the author cannot follow his wishes but must accept ours. The habits and tastes of a nation can only be changed in three ways according to Rousseau, by laws, public opinion, and pleasure; and the theatre can make use of none of them to achieve this end: laws are excluded; the theatre must follow public opinion; and the pleasure of theatrical performances

can only cause men to come back more often. The tragedy does not teach us to love virtue and to hate vice; for the virtuous and the vicious even to be recognized on the stage, these sentiments must exist beforehand. And all men do prefer virtue to vice in others; that is not the point, but rather, how are we to make them practice virtue? There is no indication that theatregoers perform their duties more punctiliously or readily than non-theatregoers. Furthermore, and this is what is most important, does not the theatre actually remove virtue further from us? Great heroes are surely the models, but what have we to do with heroes? We would be only too glad to share their pleasurable passions, but we do not feel called upon to share their great renunciations, for we do not pretend to be heroes; the passions are made more attractive, while virtue becomes the preserve of special kinds of beings. We learn to cry for others and to applaud our generous souls when we have no sacrifice to make; men are thus given a cheap way to satisfy their moral needs. Men are softened by the tragedy; they hear vice, adorned with the charms of poetry, defended in the mouths of villains; they become accustomed to thinking of the most terrible crimes and to pity those who commit them; they become more indulgent toward their own weakness; and they exhaust their sympathy on alien and distant objects while forgetting their own neighbors and duties. The latter objection could be met by making the drama realistic, but that would destroy its ennobling effect and do away with its instructive purpose. All things considered, the tragedy can, at best, be said to be not a very sure device for improving men.

If tragedy is indifferent, comedy is positively dangerous, for it touches us immediately and with figures much more like those whom we know. It is claimed that comedy makes vice ridiculous and turns men away from it very powerfully for fear of being laughed at. Rousseau denies this effect emphatically; to be ridiculous does not mean to be vicious, for virtue too can be laughed at in many circumstances by the ignorant and the malevolent. The

effect of comedy is to attach men more strongly to public opinion, to being sociable rather than virtuous. Duty often requires the courage to be independent of the complacent lethargy of one's fellows, but comedy makes men believe that the worst thing is to be out of step with what is popular; for again, audiences will not laugh at what does not seem funny to them. Virtuous men do not laugh at the vicious; they despise them. Hence, comedy has a tendency to substitute the ridiculous for the vicious and the conventional for the virtuous.

To support this conclusion, Rousseau turns to an analysis of the plays of Molière, an analysis which is one of the most famous and brilliant samples of literary criticism ever written. He accepts the genius of this author and considers him the greatest of all comic poets; he has never voluntarily missed a single performance of any of Molière's works. His very perfection makes him the most favorable case to examine to find out whether the comedy is beneficial to civil society; his intention was the best, but his power is such that if there are harmful effects he will also be able to work them most effectively. The fact is that in all of his plays simplicity is ridiculed and men of the world are favored; the atmosphere of Molière's works is that of sophisticated society where good manners take the place of virtue. One always laughs at pretentious but decent fools, fathers disobeyed, and betrayed husbands. These are the ridiculous people, but the vicious are those who take advantage of them. The net result is that the man influenced by these works would prefer to be thought rather dishonest than an easy dupe; such is the morality of society—shrewdness is preferred to virtue when the two do not coincide.

The best example of Molière's tendency is to be found in his masterpiece, the *Misanthrope*. In this play Molière decided to show in its fullness the ridiculousness of the man who is ridiculous precisely because he is virtuous. Alceste is indeed a virtuous man, for he stands on the best principles and honesty is his only standard; he refuses to make compromises with the manners of his time. He

is not a misanthrope in the sense that he does not care for men but because he respects them and regards them as responsible beings, so that he cannot bear their avoidable failings; he is disgusted by those who are obliging to the vicious. This man is opposed to his friend Philinte in the play, who is an easy-going man of the world, taking his bearings by society and unwilling to risk men's displeasure by insisting on standards which most men do not choose to meet. The moral of such a piece can only be to favor an ethic of getting along comfortably, as opposed to the absurd posture of austere insistence on principle. The play is very funny indeed and is all the more blameable for that. But furthermore, Molière actually made some artistic errors in his development of the character. He misrepresented some parts of Alceste's character and did so not because he was unaware of what such a man would really be like but because, if he had been faithful to the misanthrope's nature, his play would have been a great deal less funny. In this way a writer is not only not beneficial to his audience but actually perverts the truth to reach his goal of pleasing. Rousseau identifies himself with the misanthrope, and his act of choosing his civil duties before the proprieties of the Encyclopedists' coterie is laughable from the point of view of men of the world, just as is the misanthrope's intransigent insistence on principle. This is the way the morality of the theatre is opposed to that of citizenship. Molière's successors, without his talent or his probity, ridiculed the most sacred rights and duties and freed men from their awe before them with liberating laughter. So the comedy, too, cannot be said to improve men's morals.

The third head in Rousseau's criticism of the drama is the dominance of the love interest. The ancients rarely used love as a major theme in their tragedies; but with the decadence of the political interest, modern writers have more and more adopted love as the major attraction in their works. But love is the realm of women; it is they who command in it. The result is that all that is considered important must be considered so from the point of view of women's

pleasure. This is a reversal of the natural role which women should play in civil society as modest wives and mothers; it gives women the ascendancy, tends to corrupt them; and men give up their proper way of life in order to pay their court to women. A man does not think he is really living unless he is in love. The women in the theatre are made to appear wise and virtuous, so that a young man thinks that all he need do is fall in love to become virtuous himself. A society with such a view of women produces denatured ones, as well as men who think of their duty in amorous terms. Furthermore, since old men, who should be the most respectable figures in any sound society, cannot be the lovers and are frequently, because of their position, necessarily opposed to them, they are always represented as fools, villains, or ogres. The effect of such a theatre is to fill Paris with dotards trying to act the parts of swains. What is more, the love interest in plays influences an overpowering passion, one most likely to be in conflict with the responsibilities to country and family. The fact that the loves of the theatre are always decent ones changes nothing; for the awakening of the passion can come from the theatre, but how it will be used depends upon the character of the individual affected by the passion. The proper use of love is perhaps the most important preoccupation of civil society, for it is connected with the family, the source of a state's well- or ill-being, and it is a passion which, if badly trained, can very easily set men at war with their duties. But the playwrights must always make the lover, and the successful lover at that, the most appealing figure in their works; a play which opposed love would meet with ill success. The writer's desire to please sets his interests in opposition to those of the legislator, and the society advocated by the proponents of the theatre would be fit for writers but not for men. There should be no government *by* writers but rather *of* them, for there is not a one-to-one correspondence of their ends with those of civil society. A society without writers might well ask itself if it ought to encourage their presence.

The physical presence of a theatre is bound to change the way of life of a city which did not previously have one; not only does it change the habits of the citizens directly but it requires certain conditions to support it. This fact makes it an object of concern for the legislator even if the effect of the plays were itself beneficial. For the character and the tastes of the people depend upon their habits. The habits of a nation are its all-in-all; they are the cause of the kind of men which it produces, and the production of men who are capable of the best possible life and of being good citizens is the end of statesmanship. The statesman cannot shirk this duty by saying that he will create the conditions of liberty and let each man choose for himself, for a man in an industrial city can hardly lead the life of a pastoral man; moreover, in society our opinions are formed by the dominant opinions of the public, which means that it is highly improbable that a man will have real freedom in his tastes or habits. The true statesman's art is to be able to judge the way of life of his nation and to know which institutions will preserve it and which will destroy it. This is a delicate business and requires a special knowledge of the particular customs of a nation and their relation to its whole way of life. The Encyclopedists have left no role for statesmanship in their universal science. They have sought a political science which would guarantee sound government everywhere, but have forgotten that all that is best in man comes into flower only in very rare circumstances and as a result of extraordinary efforts. These conditions cannot become general; what can become general is only a system of laws and a way of life reflecting a lowered standard of human excellence. The best is not often realized in politics; it is a target to be aimed at, and the means of attaining it vary with the particular people involved. The theatre may be fine, but are the conditions of its existence always compatible with those of a healthy morality? This must be considered, and Rousseau tries to give some latitude to statesmanship that is generally lacking in the thinking of his and our time. The statesman must first judge whether the habits of his country are good or bad and then the sort of effect the theatre will have on them.

Rousseau always takes as his model a small, free republic—Geneva for the moderns, Sparta for the ancients. He wants a city where men can take the most active part in civic life, where the citizens know one another and are most dependent on themselves, where habits of justice, moderation, and courage are required and admired. Can such a city tolerate a theatre? He gives the example of a small community of men living on a mountainside; each owns his own property and lives off its produce; each is sufficient unto himself, for their temperance has kept their needs small; each spends his leisure in making furniture and useful artifices; their entertainments are singing and talking together. A theatre brought among them would produce certain changes: (1) It would turn their attentions and their pleasures away from their work; it would occupy both their time and their thoughts. Not only would it create a certain dissatisfaction with their life as it is, it would also imply that they did less work. (2) They would have to dress well and pay for tickets, which would increase their expenses and make them more dependent on, and in need of, wealth. (3) They would have to build the theatre and make roads to it. These things, not necessary in themselves, would become so as the new pleasures became habits. Hence, taxes would have to be established. (4) And, perhaps most important, the taste for luxury would be introduced. Women who go to the theatre want to appear well and a competition among them always arises. The vanity of women is promoted wherever there are refined entertainments, and their husbands usually support them in it. Adornment becomes an object in itself, and all sorts of expense and attention are devoted to it—not to mention the revolution in family life that is its result. This expense and attention must be given at the sacrifice of other things. In such a community, admittedly a healthy one, the theatre would clearly be pernicious.

Where morals are simple, the people laborious, and their need for relaxation can be satisfied by their own efforts, a theatre should be discouraged by the legislator. But in a big city, full of idle peo-

ple, where irresponsible and indecent conduct can be hidden by its anonymity, where the people get no satisfaction from their labors, the theatre and all sorts of external pleasures should be encouraged in order to channel the activities of men who would find worse amusements on their own. It is, indeed, possible to construct a civil society where the hard demands of self-imposed restraint are not necessary; a large nation where there is a strong police, an efficient governmental machine, and a populace attached to greedy gain can perhaps function quite efficiently. But such a nation is founded on an indifference to the kind of men who are its citizens; the state is fine, but its matter is contemptible. The theatre in such a nation is not an ennobling force but only an instrument of policy for keeping the subjects amused because they have nothing to do with their liberty and because their training has been such as to prepare them only to abuse it. The theatre is a substitute for virtue; it both helps to avoid certain occasions for the exercise of vice and can practice men in a certain refinement of manners which can make social intercourse easier and more agreeable. Considering the audience to which it is directed, a theatre conceived in this sense is neither a force for the encouragement of virtue nor is it likely to produce great works of art. Rousseau's formulation that the theatre is good in a bad city and bad in a good city means that men admirable in themselves are likely to flourish in cities like Sparta, where literary freedom is clearly contrary to the institutions, while literary freedom is possible only in nations where works of art can only palliate vice and be used for ends wholly dissimilar to those noble ones art sets for itself. The cultivation of minor talents or superficial graces is all that the theatre can promise; this is not undesirable in itself, but talents and graces require moral men to use them if they are not to be pernicious.

The most common objection to the theatre was that actors and actresses are immoral and dissolute and set a bad example. D'Alembert suggested that this danger could be averted by severe laws. But are laws really an answer to such a problem? Laws cannot accom-

plish everything, and statesmanship consists in finding the laws appropriate to each country; the laws are dependent on the character of a people, not the reverse. Laws instituted in contradiction to public opinion must surely be disobeyed; thus, they not only fail to achieve their end but cause men to have a contempt for law in general. Nor is public opinion fundamentally influenced by reason; it is a result of habit and of countless other factors. Now, the actors will be popular and will be ministers to the pleasures of the people; they will be protected and admired. If this is so, laws cannot control them if they are by nature dissolute; they will gradually transform the law in transforming the people. And Rousseau argues that the contempt that moral men have for actors is no mere prejudice but intimately bound up with their estate. The actor is a man who gives up his own estate to play the roles of others; he has the habit of being all things to all men. This very habit is degrading to a man's dignity, which consists in always being himself. Actors live in a world of illusions and intense passions; such men can rarely be simple, and they hardly fit into a regular way of life. They continually must humiliate themselves pandering to the applause of an anonymous audience. Some of them may be fine men, but the general character of the profession usually molds them. They require a luxurious life and bring it in their wake. The actresses can hardly help being worse, for in addition to having the same disadvantages as the actors, they are women, and attractive ones, and since the specific virtue of women is modesty and actresses must be immodest, they are doubly degraded. They must be immodest because they show themselves off in public, because they live with men, because their whole art is to make themselves attractive and lovable. Modesty is the crown of women, according to Rousseau, and the foundation of the family. There are those rationalists who insist that such modesty is only a social prejudice, but this is only another example of that science which cannot listen to the voice of nature but can only violate it. It is possible to free women and make them like men, but the specific function and charm of women is de-

stroyed, and the men are forced to live lives more like those of women. The actresses, accepted and feted, will have a generally deteriorating effect on morals, and the example of their pleasures will attract many who would have otherwise led virtuous lives. Such are the effects of the theatre: loss of interest in one's own life, luxury, and dissoluteness. Are such habits, Rousseau asks, likely to produce men capable and desirous of sacrificing their pleasures to the hard duties of governing themselves?

And what is the purpose of all this? To create taste. These people will have taste finally, but bad taste. Good taste requires big cities, fine arts, luxury, a highly developed social life, love and debauchery—great vice which must be embellished. It smells of the courts of monarchs. The grace and propriety of a Voltaire will never be found in simple republics. These rustics will only play at being connoisseurs. To have no taste and not to want it is a respectable posture and is not incommensurate with the dignity of a Roman; but to want it and only have bad taste is a ridiculous posture. And, after all, what is this taste so vaunted by the Enlightenment? Knowing all about petty things. This notion of taste was invented to put a veneer on the ugly picture of man painted by Hobbes and accepted by all of Rousseau's contemporaries; it suffices only to trivialize talent and art while corrupting men. Man understood as being motivated by fear of violent death and directed to his comfortable preservation through commerce cannot warm to the exploits of heroism or be attracted by passionate but dangerous loves; the drama will either be a mere diversion for him or he will teach it to tell him stories which encourage his own petty desires. The drama, far from giving man a glory set by the high demands of art and beauty, will be formed by the economics of a philistine and unnatural society. The only way to have true beauty is to have beautiful men and that means free and virtuous men.

In this way Rousseau strikes at the kingpin of the scheme of *l'Encyclopédie*. The freedom from prejudice, and the comfort provided by philosophy and the mechanical arts, respectively, do

not present a satisfactory scheme if they are to be used by selfish brutes or esthetes in salons. The taste for the fine arts as understood by the Encyclopedists is not a bright horizon to look to but only a device to make men forget an enslavement of which they are unaware. Only by the uncompromising return to the principles of antiquity, its rationalism and its politics, can man hope for a dignity beyond the self-interested gratification of artificial appetites. Political virtue must come first, and the greatness of the arts, for which Rousseau also pleads, will come later, based on the true greatness of political man.

If reflection on Rousseau's life does not make it clear that he understood the importance of art and science for man, a careful reading of the *Letter to d'Alembert* and the *First Discourse* should suffice to prove it. His work is as much a defense of the arts against a degradation brought on by their popularization as a defense of civil society. The moderns had forgotten nature, and nature teaches that human life has two poles at tension with one another: the life of the mind and the life of the city; this tension is an irreconcilable one, rooted in man's very existence, and it is the very core of Rousseau's thought. Only if one begins by understanding the city as it presents itself naturally, without the admixture of alien doctrines concerning the goodness of the arts, can the problem of the arts emerge in its full clarity. Can there be great art without great men? The misanthrope's morality is that of a sound civil society, one devoted to the training of beautiful citizens; and, if it raises doubts about the goodness of the arts, it is at this point that we must begin to consider their nature. Rousseau's teaching is that the prudence of Lacedaemon cannot be united with the urbanity of Athens, as d'Alembert hoped, unless one wishes to misconstrue them both. This is the source of his sublime self-awareness. Perhaps we moderns have forgotten what the real problem of art is when we smile at the illiberal inconsistency which causes the poet-philosophers Plato and Rousseau to banish poets from their cities.